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ABSTRACT

Because of the growing anomaly in the United States and elsewhere--that there is plenty of work, but not enough jobs--vocational/technical schools must develop a new, deeper level of compatibility between work and learning, keeping both systems flexible. Rather than thinking of the transition from learning to working in terms of linking disparate entities, educators and business people should think in terms of a continuum. For example, New York's Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) has been operating as an integral part of the industry for which it trains its graduates. In addition to carefully watching graduate placement statistics to prevent specialities from drifting away from industry requirements, FIT invites industry representatives to serve on course committees; encourages faculty to accept outside consulting assignments; employs practicing professionals to teach in both day and evening programs as well as in all senior professional classes; involves industry leaders in educational activities; makes facilities available to manufacturers; and offers programs for professionals. FIT also conducts major studies for the fashion industry, such as on the causes of firm outmigration from New York City and provides industry seminars, a machine test and demonstration center, a maintenance skills upgrading center, and a newsletter on emerging technology. (TR)

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EDUCATION-TO-WORK-LINKAGES

As history is measured, the subject Education-to work-Linkages is fairly new. As recently as a hundred years ago, a discussion on links between education and work would have been mercifully brief. There weren't any.

Those were the days when foremen with unbelievably complete autonomy and authority ran the nation's factories. They were the tin-pot aristocrats of industry. We are told that these foremen "deported themselves with great dignity and . . . customarily reported for work attired in silk hats, cutaway coats and attendant accessories."

When a foreman was short of hands, according to one contemporary account, "he went to the gate, looked over the crowd, picked out the man he wanted, and hired him."

Now it is a little different.

The negative correlation between school enrollments and probable job opportunities has become a familiar subject in the popular press.

Providing effective linkages between education and work has become a national concern--and one of the very gravest importance.

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I believe it may be the most important issue on the national agenda today--more important than the energy crisis, more important than tax reform, more important than the protection of the the environment. I mean this literally.

Let me tell you why I think so.

Ever since Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny in 1765 and triggered what we have come to call the industrial revolution, working people's attitudes toward society have been shaped--more than anything--by society's capacity to provide jobs.

The central reservation about a free society has been--almost from the beginning--that it does not always provide enough jobs to go around.

Shakespeare wrote, "you take my life if you take the means whereby I live."

People have always lived in terror of machines they thought would take their work away. The Luddites smashed the early knitting and weaving machines. (It is said that Walter Hunt, the inventor of the safety pin, invented a sewing machine in 1832, years before singer. But he refused to patent--and perhaps foreswore a great fortune--because he was afraid it would put seamstresses out of work.)

A team of psychologists recently studied a group of unemployed people. They reported that "jobless men feel small; they talk the language of insignificance. They feel suddenly confused, disillusioned and betrayed."

Anthropologists define personalization--being a person--as the degree of one's attachment to the social system. Thus Jules Henry describes people who have lost their jobs as "scarcely people at all." The consequences of this depersonalization, he continues, are "hostility, loss of social capabilities and apathy."

The last time the teen-age unemployment rate was less than 10% was more than 20 years ago. Increasingly our young people's first serious exposure to the real weather of free society is a failure to find a job they feel is suitable.

This is serious in itself. But the secondary consequences are hair-raising. In a recent survey, only 14% of American young people said they felt they were part of the free enterprise system. A society with that degree of alienation is a dangerously unstable society. And an important part of the solution, I submit to you, is in the problem of a lack of national policies which create work opportunities.

Elsewhere in the world, nation's are experiencing the terrible results of this kind of alienation when it reaches a certain critical mass and intensity.

Consider terror-torn Italy. It seems to me that much of Italy's torment may be the inevitable result of a massive failure to relate the world of education to the world of work.

Italian schools, if we are to believe the press reports, have become almost totally ineffective.

In the high schools, the dominant issue is something called the "Political 6". Students demand that teachers give all students the same minimum passing grade--6 on a scale of 10.

The universities have dropped the pretense of education. Since the revolt of 1968, universities have been forced to abandon all standards of admission or performance. In practice, this means anyone can enroll in any institution, select any specialty and then claim to be qualified for any profession. They are educated simply by self-designation.

But, of course, there are no jobs. There are a million unemployed young people. I understand for example that some 23,000 self-designated architects are looking for non-existent jobs--for which, incidentally, they are not qualified. The Mad Hatter's tea party is suddenly a terrifying reality.

And you may be sure that some fraction of those young people are members of the red brigades who have sometimes singled out personnel officers as victims of their maiming attacks.

You can take it as a given that when large numbers of people believe the forces that vitally affect their lives have moved outside their control, a deranged minority will twist that circumstance into an excuse for terrorism.

Or take India, early this Spring, The New York Times carried a heart-rending feature about India's educated unemployed. There are 700,000 jobless college graduates in India and the number is increasing by 150,000 a year.

There are efforts to slow down college enrollments, but no one has any hope they will be successful. An Indian official says, "What's the point of educating these people so much and then turning them out on the street. It's worse than useless; it's dangerous."

These multitudes have carefully prepared themselves for work that isn't there and never was and never will be. Now that these are "educated", the educated unemployed consider manual work beneath them. They have fought their way expectantly into a kind of limbo. So they sit together over empty coffee cups and wait.

The two examples of Italy and India tell the same story--outrageously escalated expectations of what education can provide and a total breakdown of their realization. There are other examples:

The May 22, 1978 volume of the Chronicle of Higher Education headlined:

"Youth unemployment stirs international concern"

"In the United States, projections of supply and demand for university graduates suggest there will be a surplus of 950,000 over the 1974 - 1985 period."

"In France, a surplus of 16,000 engineers, architects, and scientists is expected by 1981. In 1976, 45,000 professional and managerial personnel in France were unable to find work."

"In Japan, only 70.7% of the 1976 university graduates were able to find jobs by the end of that year."

"In the Netherlands more than 1,300 students who graduated in 1977 were out of work at the end of that year."

The problem, the Chronicle goes on to say, is not limited to the developed world.

"In some developing countries the high number of university graduates unable or unwilling to take available jobs is a major headache." And of course the even higher number of unemployed high school graduates in the developed world has already reached alarming proportions.

Krishan Kumar, lecturer in sociology at Great Britain's University at Kent has suggested that a shift in attitudes among youth must take place . . . even more it means reconsidering what different kinds of rewards might be acceptable, and what sort of work organization might be appropriate.

Torsten Husén in an analysis for the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development noted a number of key changes in attitudes of youths toward work, jobs, and education.

Two key findings:

1) They reject the notion of a career as a continuum from one point of selection to another.

2) They are attaching more importance to "personal fulfillment" and intrinsic satisfaction in their work.

We can all see signs of these identical tendencies in this country.

What is the answer? I'm inclined to side with Gertrude Stein and ask instead, "what is the question?"

We in vocational education have been saying for the last few years that what we desperately need is national policy for vocational education. I am moving away from that view. Perhaps we are less in need of a policy of education than a policy of work. We are more in need of national policies that create and encourage small businesses in the private sector than in creating programs that prepare people for specific jobs. We need national policies that recognize what does in fact create jobs for the work that must be done.

Let me be more specific, while I try to stretch an incredibly complex concept.

I used to think that one of the reasons we vocational educators were able to say self-righteously that the non-vocational system was mis-educating half America's young people was that a bureaucratic educational system was preparing people for non-bureaucratic work places. Now I'm not so sure.

It's clearer and clearer that business--and particularly big business is offering jobs when it should be offering work opportunities. Scholars are finding it harder and harder to find any connection between pay and performance and even promotion and performance. "Pay and prequisites", says The New York Times, "are often linked to seniority rather than to ability." A bank official admits to dealing with incompetents by "finding them a plush office and a fancy title and keeping them out of the way."

This raises a question. Should our aim as educators be to prepare young people for jobs in such private or public bureaucracies--or should we prepare them for work--even with a capacity to create their own work?

John Dewey, that unread and misunderstood genius of educational theory, wrote that a proper conception of industrial education would, "prize freedom more than docility, initiative more than automatic skill, insight and understanding more than the capacity to recite lessons or to execute tasks under the direction of others." Dewey was suggesting that we prepare young people to be self-employable either on their own or inside organizations--that we prepare them for work rather than for jobs.

Almost accidentally, my institution has found that it is preparing people to create their own work. A lot of my graduates--I believe an increasing number--start their own businesses when they leave F.I.T. We find--retrospectively--that we have not prepared them for jobs. We have prepared them to create their own jobs. We have prepared them for work. It may be one of those small distinctions with immense consequences.

These graduates may, in turn, be providing work--or jobs--for others.

The economy has a need for new businesses, which almost always start small. Big businesses are not so much a cause of economic growth as one of growth's results. Small businesses are a principal source of new ideas, of economic growth, and of new work. Nowadays I'm becoming much more interested in what the "whole earth" catalogue people were trying to tell us a few years ago.

Not long ago, the M.I.T. Development Foundation compared job formation in 16 companies. Six of the companies were seasoned giants with sales in the billions; five were larger companies with a history of innovation; five were smaller new companies built on new technologies. The period under study was 1969 - 1974.

The sales of the six largest companies such as Bethlehem Steel and General Electric grew 11.4% a year, but their employment rolls increased at the rate of only 6/10 of 1% a year. They created only 25,000 new jobs.

The sales of the five large innovative companies such as 3M and Xerox increased 13.2% a year, and their employment rolls increased at the rate of 4.3% a year. These five companies created 106,000 new jobs.

The sales of the five small high-technology companies such as Data General and Computer Graphics increased 42½% a year, and their employment rolls increased at the rate of 41% a year. Even though their total sales were less than a thirtieth of those in the largest group, these five small companies created 35,000 new jobs in five years--10,000 more than the six giants.

The alarming fact is the rate of formation of smaller companies which often create more work has plummeted in the last few years. In 1968, 300 high technology small companies were created, in 1977 none. The birth rate of such companies today is 0%.

This is one of the reasons I have paused in my concern about national policies of manpower, vocational education, and full employment. I wonder now if the issue is not really one of a national capital incentive program toward entrepreneurial development.

It is becoming clearer to me that the role of the university in the years ahead is to examine its role in the preparation of entrepreneurs.

America is rapidly losing the technical superiority created by the formation of small high technology companies that has been the base of our prosperity, our proudest export. We have been rich in skill. Our competitive position in world markets was built on the superb technical skills and productivity of our people. We are losing that edge. We must reclaim it.

But how about creating entrepreneurial work opportunities inside organizations?

A year or so ago, as a form of protest, the employees of Eastern Airlines, in lieu of a strike, ran the airline by the book, following to the letter all the approved procedures for getting things done. They did their jobs instead of their work, and the airline was practically paralyzed.

I believe there's a fatal flaw in the approach to management which, only yesterday, was accepted almost universally. For years it was assumed that management's task was to tell people what to do and to punish them in some way if they failed or refused to do it.

Now we are beginning to realize that this view of the administrative task has been largely discredited. It is a suitable way to manage only a fraction of a human being's capacities. You can command a man to turn a nut on an assembly line, but you cannot <u>command</u> him to be inventive

or caring or resourceful. Conventional management, based on control, cannot embrace the qualities most modern institutions need most.

More and more, the problem of administration is not perceived as somehow getting people to do what they are told to do, but to somehow inspire them to do what they cannot be told to do--to do work instead of holding a job.

This, I believe, is the flavor of the future. It is what must define a new approach to linking education and work.

We must work toward a new deeper level of compatibility between work and learning. We must above all keep both systems flexible. Rigidities shut people out, disconnect workers from the work that must be done.

We must think of the transition from learning to work less in terms of a linkage -- which implies connecting two disparate entities -- and more in terms of a continuum.

Let me say a word or two about my institution, not because I believe we have solved this problem, but only because we are working at it.

Improving the compatability of education and work is what we do. It is not one of a variety of activities at F.I.T. it is our central activity. It is our reason for being. We measure the success of the institution by how smoothly we connect education and work.

We watch our placement statistics as carefully as a navigator watches his compass. Any sag in placement in any specialty is examined carefully as possible evidence that our program is drifting away from industry's requirements. We believe we have the best placement record in the country--with the possible exception of my own almamater West Point.

But placement performance is only one form of feedback. Representatives of industry serve on committees that review new courses and revise old ones. In a changing industry, this process must be continuous. We are always trying to erase any difference between what happens in our classroom and what happens in the industry's workrooms.

We encourage our faculty to accept outside consulting assignments--to be involved in the industry. On the other hand large numbers of practicing professionals teach in our day and evening program, and in all our senior professional classes.

Industry leaders attend student discussions, participate in panels, appear as special lecturers. The Office of Community Resources is continuously involving students with the industry along with other New York environments. Dozens of industry workshops are held each year. Special programs are developed for particular sub-industries or firms. Sears Roebuck, for instance, underwrites a continuing program for its buying staff. Manufacturers use the F.I.T. Amphi-Theater for fashion shows.

Women's Wear Daily, the Holy Bible of our industry wrote last year that "It is difficult to draw a line of demarcation between F.I.T. and the industry, so close is their kinship." The reason it's hard to draw a line of demarcation is simple: There isn't any. F.I.T. is part of the fashion industry.

* * * * *

So much for one example.

When we look at the bigger picture, we are confronted with an anomoly -- one that has created a problem in the United States and a crisis in a growing number of countries elsewhere.

There is plenty of work -- but not enough jobs.

God knows there is plenty of work to do. There are plenty of people who want better houses, better clothes. There are plenty of people who want to get on with the rebuilding of our decaying urban centers.

Plenty of more mature and discriminating consumers want better products of better quality.

There's plenty of work to do in putting our society on a re-cycling basis. This, all by itself, is a most exciting possibility. By converting industrial processes to re-use waste materials, we will realize half a dozen important ambitions all at once. We can preserve the environment, produce products of better quality that take less energy to produce, and run on less energy, and -- as a bonus -- improve our balance of payments by reducing imports of raw materials.

We try to ask ourselves not only what the fashion industry can do for us, but what we can do for the fashion industry.

For example, we conducted a major study of the causes of the outmigration of fashion industry firms from New York and how to arrest it.

We provide:

- Industry seminars on production control, quality control, incentive systems, equipment evaluation, operator training and supervision;
- A center to test and demonstrate machines incorporating advanced technology;
- A training center to upgrade the skills maintenance mechanics;
- A newsletter reporting on emerging technology.

More and more, we are acting as advocates for our industry, moving closer to a posture as an all-purpose resource for the industry, not just a trainer of some of its specialized job holders.

We conduct research on subjects ranging from the development of fabric flammability standards to computer-assisted design. We conduct high level seminars on a wide range of subjects selected in close collaboration with industry leaders. Our full and part-time faculty represents the largest single center of highly-qualified technical know-how on the manufacture and marketing of soft goods in the nation.

There is plenty of work, but a persistent shortage of jobs.

Isn't it perfectly clear that we must begin to prepare young people for work which is abundant--either on their own or inside our organizations--and not for jobs which will always be scarce.

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